

# Secular Women of the Triangle Book Club Discussion Questions

## ***We of Little Faith: Why I Stopped Pretending to Believe (And Maybe You Should Too)* by Kate Cohen**

### **Expectations for group discussion:**

- Be respectful and keep an open mind to others' opinions and experiences. We are a large group with varied cultures, religious and non-religious backgrounds, politics, and life experiences. There is room for everyone as long as we remain respectful about any differences.
- Any personal details shared should be kept private and not shared outside the group unless you have the permission of the individual.
- Silence doesn't have to be awkward as we gather our thoughts. Embrace it!
- Be mindful of your own individual speaking time to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to share.
  - 3x3 rule (number can vary based on group number): After you share, wait for three people to speak or three minutes to pass before sharing again.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is something new you learned from this book or an "aha" moment you experienced while reading?
2. Cohen urges readers to embrace the title "atheist" over other titles such as agnostic, humanist, skeptic, or free thinker.
  - a. What label(s) do you use to describe your lack of beliefs and why? Have these labels changed over time? If so, how and what caused the change?
  - b. Have you ever found yourself using the term "agnostic" instead of "atheist" because you felt it would be more positively received?
3. Cohen recalls coming out as an atheist for the first time to someone outside her family, only to hear, "I've never met an atheist." She then reflects that she likely wasn't the first atheist this person had encountered—just the first to admit it.
  - a. Are you "out" as an atheist? Does your openness vary with different groups such as family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors? If you're not open, what's holding you back? If you are open, what kind of reception have you received?
  - b. Have you had a similar experience to Cohen's where people assume you are the only non-believer they've met?
4. In "Part Two: What We Lose and What We Gain" Cohen explores her struggle with finding secular alternatives to the things that religion so easily offers its adherents including "Words to channel joy and gratitude, wonder and angst. Ceremonies to mark life changes." (p. 49) and "a second home... a small piece of grace and beauty and history and community" (p. 120).
  - a. What secular alternatives have you found to prayer, rites of passage, and a house of worship?
  - b. What rituals, routines, or practices have you incorporated into your life to create moments of reflection or mindfulness or to foster a sense of transcendence or find comfort during difficult moments?
  - c. Have you found a "second home" that provides you with that sense of belonging and inspiration?
5. Cohen reflects, "To what extent, precisely, do I let my children make up their own minds about life? What lessons do I teach, and what do I refrain from teaching, lest I influence

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them too much?"

- a. How much influence did your family have on your religious beliefs? Did you feel like you had the agency to make up your own mind?
  - b. How did you raise your own children? How much did you share your beliefs versus letting them make up their own mind? Is there anything you would have done differently in hindsight?
6. In the chapter "Life with No After" (p. 57), Cohen explores profound topics such as death and the meaning of life, presenting various perspectives. She references Epicurus' notion that "death is the deprivation of sensation" (p. 66) and the philosopher Setiya's argument that the key to living in the face of life's inevitable end lies in blending the telic (goal-oriented) and atelic (non-goal-oriented) aspects of life—finding joy in the journey, not just in achieving the goal (p. 72).
- a. What secular philosophies, literature, or ideas have offered you comfort or insights when grappling with these challenging questions?
7. In the chapter "How Will We Know Right from Wrong?" Cohen explores the connection between morality and religion, questioning the presumption that belief in God is necessary for moral behavior and arguing that religion doesn't shape our values but rather we bring our values to religion.
- a. As a secular woman, where do you believe morality originates, and what shapes your sense of right and wrong?
  - b. What values matter most to you, and how have they evolved throughout your journey away from religion or within a secular framework? What keeps you from committing a daily secular crime spree?
8. Cohen separates the cultural practices of religion such as celebrating holidays and enjoying religious art and music from belief in a higher power.
- a. Do you participate in culturally religious activities or celebrate religious holidays such as Christmas?
  - b. Do you feel that leaving faith has impacted your ability to fully embrace the holiday spirit? How has your relationship with major religious holidays evolved since stepping away from faith?
9. Using Cohen's formula for creating your own holiday (outlined on p. 86-91), is there a holiday our discussion group would like to create together? What themes, rituals, or traditions would make it meaningful to us?